

# brims with great expectations

'Waking up on the morning after the election with the full realization that I now represent nearly a half million people gave me pause.'

By Darrell Steinberg

I was serving my first term as a member of the Sacramento City Council in 1995 when I thought I had a really promising public policy idea — Students Today Achieving Results for Tomorrow (START). The program would open 20 Sacramento schools from 2:30 to 6 p.m. daily and provide our children with a safe place for academic enrichment, arts and recreation.

I convinced myself that the program would be immediately endorsed by my colleagues and the public alike. What objections could there possibly be? In the answer to this simple question came one of the best lessons I learned in my council service: People see things in their own ways, and to expect otherwise stalls progress in public policy.

Some asked about START, "Where will the money come from in the midst of another city budget deficit?" Others wondered, "Shouldn't we spend the money on public safety?" And the most revealing question was: "Are you going to get all the credit for this idea?"

I quickly realized that each was a perfectly reasonable question. I could not expect others to share my enthusiasm when the idea was presented to them cold, stripping them of the benefit of living with it as I had done. So, I set out to answer each question, altering the START design in the process.

And the program is better for it. Three years later, START is a huge success that is being replicated statewide and around the nation. What it took to kick off this project has provided me with the lessons I take with me to the Capitol.

As I begin my first term in the California Assembly, I have a very different, more grounded perspective on the business of being an elected official. I remain confident that public service provides endless and attainable opportunities to help people. But I also realize that good ideas are only the very beginning of the process. Implementing good ideas requires strategic planning, teamwork, persistence, good personal relationships, compromise, and anticipating op-



# I am optimistic enough to believe that I can make a difference in my first year in the Capitol.

position. In short, nothing that is worthwhile can be achieved without a great deal of hard work and a clear, realistic focus on the outcomes.

This is particularly true in a term-limited state Legislature. The challenge is to find a balance between the need to examine long-term, important public policy with the reality that members will, at most, have only six years in the Assembly to make a mark. Term limits requires new members to simultaneously listen, learn and lead. This is a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate that bipartisanship and building consensus can change seemingly insoluble public problems. November's elections created an important, progressive policy mandate. The mandate must be pursued with a style that minimizes the acrimony that too often envelops the state Capitol and erodes public confidence in the Legislature.

Waking up on the morning after the election with the full realization that I now represent nearly half a million people gave me pause. I have followed state government closely for years, and I understand that the challenges posted at this level of service will mandate that I call upon all my skills if I am to accomplish substantive change during my tenure. Until now, I have been one of nine. I will now be one of 80. I know that I must (to use a sports analogy) take my game to a higher level.

To predict any level of success given the dense thicket of competing special interests in and around the Capitol, the vagaries of the economy and budget constraints and the ever-increasing demands on our programs, would be an error.

All that being said, I am optimistic enough to believe that I can make a difference in my first year in the Capitol. I want to be a constructive participant in the debate over the large policy issues that will come before the

Legislature in 1999 and beyond — education, health care, local government finance, economic development, juvenile justice, infrastructure investment,

welfare reform, etc. — but my goal will be to focus and to move concrete pieces of that larger debate forward to implementation.

Specifically, I want to have an impact in several key areas:

- Recruiting and retaining trained teachers in our most challenged schools.
- Improving the delivery of community mental health services to help make a dent in homelessness.
- Guaranteeing adequate and reliable funding sources for local governments, including community policing.
- Ensuring that every foster child has a caring, committed, long-term adult role model, and...
- Delivering our annual state budget balanced and on time.

Though the Capitol sits in my Assembly district, my biggest adjustment will be addressing a range of issues that may or may not require direct, daily constituent contact, neighborhood organizing, and community meetings. Local government allows you to develop a closeness with the people and issues of the district that will be difficult to replicate. At the local government level, there is never a question as to whether the impact of your decisions will be felt by your constituents, or that you as their city representative will hear about that impact almost immediately. Though I will be a level removed, it is precisely this sort of interaction with constituents that inspires my enthusiasm and ideas for positive change.

I want to strike the right balance, avoid at all cost the dreaded "memberitis" that seems to affect so many in the Capitol, and not forget for a minute that I am here to represent real people and get positive things done. I want to do whatever I can to restore the faith and trust the public should have in public service and in state government as an institution. I

want to work as a problem-solver. I want to take the tasks and issues we face with the utmost seriousness while not taking myself too seriously. I want to end the first year knowing that something positive and tangible happened as a result of my efforts.

I look forward to the challenge. 🏛️

---

*Darrell Steinberg, a former Sacramento City Council member, is a Democrat representing the 9th Assembly District. Comments on his article may be e-mailed to [editor@statenet.com](mailto:editor@statenet.com)*

## Zettel

Continued from page 24

This lack of "dome experience" is both a blessing and a curse.

On one hand, there is a lack of "institutional memory" and the long-term personal relationships that can help people from different backgrounds and philosophies work together.

On the other side, we'll see greater willingness to try fresh ideas and approaches and a realization that we don't have 20 years to solve these problems. We're here for six years. Let's see what we can do.

The learning curve is steep — the complexity and variety of issues facing California is just part of that. As a freshman, I still need to learn about the system and how things work in the Capitol.

Just learning how the building works — physically as well as functionally — will be my first task.

And I must begin building the relationships needed to get things done. That means talking with my colleagues — Republican and Democrat — about what I want to accomplish, what they want to accomplish and how we can work together.

Our different backgrounds and philosophies mean we'll see problems from a different viewpoint. That doesn't necessarily make them wrong or me right.

I need to make the effort to see issues from different points of view. I need to articulate a vision on how I

propose solving the problem. And I need to be wise enough to see that others may have real insight — then have the ability to incorporate those ideas.

That doesn't mean compromising my principles, but it does mean finding a way to solve problems — a solution that fits my belief in limited government and greater personal responsibility, opportunity and accountability.

To solve real problems, we need to build consensus and bring people together — as a school board member I've done that, albeit on a much smaller scale.

I understand that there is still much to learn. I learned my first lesson as I started to assemble my legislative package.

There are so many important issues, but real change may come in increments. And it must be done carefully and thoroughly. That's why I'm limiting myself to only 10 to 12 bills this year.

I anticipate working over the next six years to make changes that will improve education — dealing with facilities, funding, teacher competency and student performance. I don't expect to solve all the problems, but I feel I will be able to make changes to increase parental involvement, expand local control and raise expectations and standards of our students, parents, teachers and administrators.

The recent elections have galvanized elected officials into taking action to improve education. We must take advantage of this opportunity.

My first goal is to pass the California Truancy Reduction Act. Kids can't learn if they are not in school. And, keeping students in school helps reduce crime.

One million California children did not learn to read, write or speak English last year. Schools are graduating students who can't add well enough to work a cash register at Burger Barn.

Without these basic skills they are destined for a life of poverty, crime or welfare — but their writing skills are so bad, some can't even fill out a welfare application.

Some of our schools are falling apart because of poor maintenance,

low expectations of teachers and students, ill-conceived social experiments, drugs and gang warfare.

We can restore public faith in our education system by demanding more of students and teachers, by raising standards, ensuring that children learn to read, write and speak English, improving school safety and requiring teachers to understand their subjects before letting them in a classroom.

Education is the key to many doors

for everyone. Education helps reduce crime, provide economic opportunity, teaches society and shows us the need to be involved in our communities.

We can create better schools if we hold our teachers accountable for teaching, students accountable for learning and ourselves accountable for their success.

There are other critical issues facing California as well — we must improve roads and highways to reduce

*"In terms of the depth*

*of its* **strategic  
thinking**

# Burson-Marsteller

*has* **no peer**

*and the scariest thing is*

*that the firm is* **getting  
better."**

Source: *INSIDE PR*, Fall 1997

## Burson-Marsteller

*Full Service Solutions to Meet Your Policy & Business Objectives*

*Allied with Sloat, Higgins and Associates*

**916•341•1000**

# I hope that I'll serve as role model for Republicans, for women and for Latinos by working hard.

traffic congestion and handle the inevitable growth of many communities.

We need to strengthen regional cooperation between city, county, state and federal transportation and planning agencies. Perhaps legislation is not the solution here — and certainly a state-only solution will not work. What we need first is to communicate and work together, look for solutions and then take action.

Everyone may have to give up a little power. And in other cases, we simply have to remove barriers to real solutions — because sometimes the best thing government can do is get out of the way.

We also need to take real action to deal with California's water problems — troubles are brewing on many fronts, and while not yet a full-scale crisis, it will come at the next drought. CALFED offers a great deal of promise in deal-

ing with some of the water problems surrounding the Delta and perhaps this is a model that can be put to use in other areas. But we still face a crisis with Colorado River water, and we must find a working balance between environment, agriculture (Central Valley, Imperial Valley and San Diego), new communities, business and urban needs.

Local government financing is a shambles — too much top-down control from the state is forcing bad planning on cities, counties and school districts.

And, health care concerns — both real and perceived — are growing. As a health care professional, I want to ensure that quality and patient care and choice are maximized — but at the same time, we must contain costs or few Californians will be able to afford decent health care.

We can no longer afford to "abstain" on these problems or let partisan bickering keep us from taking the first steps to resolution.

I don't expect to solve all of California's problems in six years — some of which have been created over the past 30 years — but I do expect that we'll take the first steps in dealing with some of the most pressing issues.

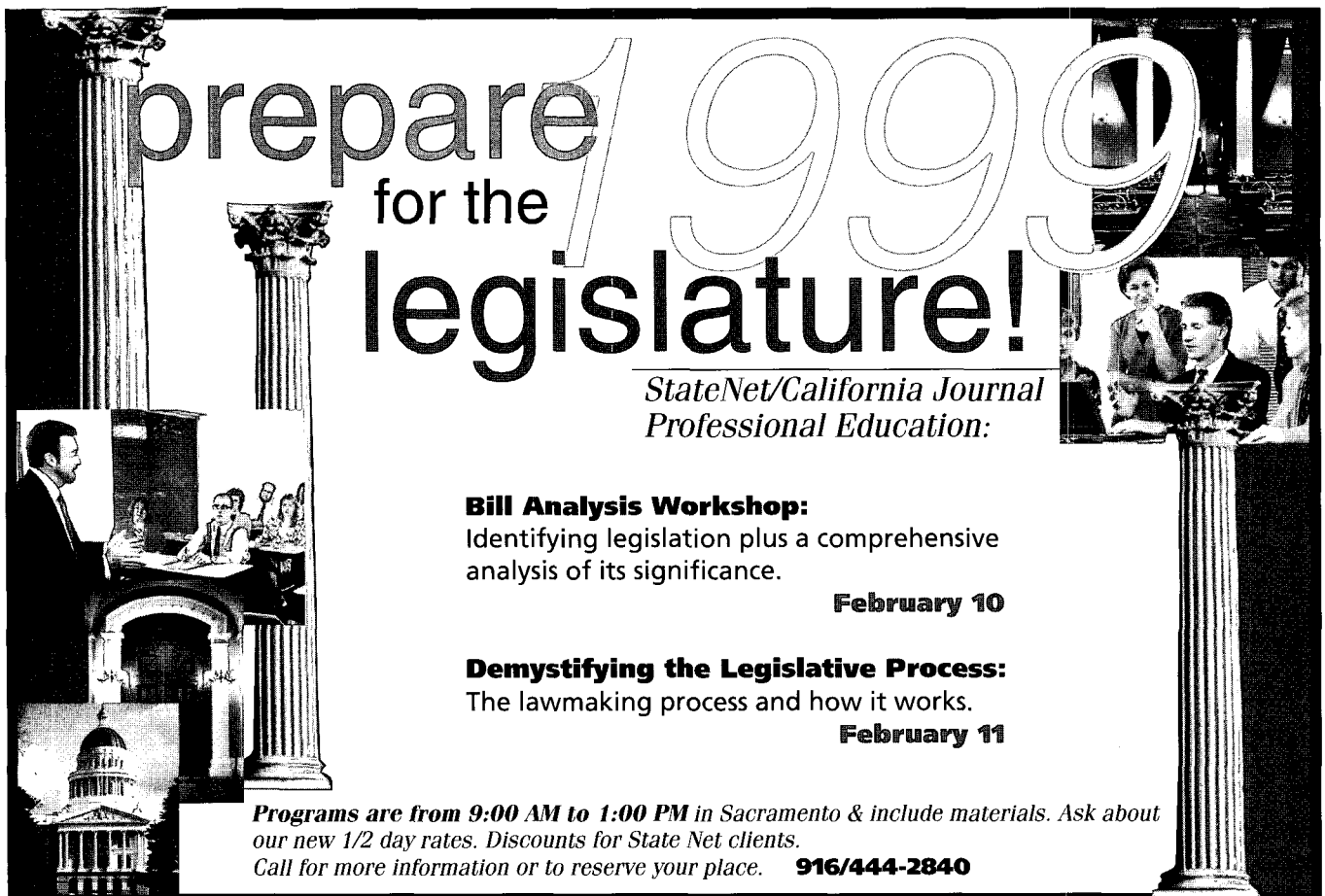
I hope I can provide some answers.

And I hope that I'll serve as role model for Republicans, for women and for Latinos by working hard, standing by my principles while solving problems.

I expect the six years will hold many opportunities, successes and disappointments — and yes, even failures. Making a difference is never easy — but it's worth the effort. 🏛️

---

*Charlene Zettel, a former school board member, is a Republican representing the 75th Assembly district in San Diego. Comments on her article may be e-mailed to [editor@statenet.com](mailto:editor@statenet.com)*



## prepare for the 1999 legislature!

*StateNet/California Journal  
Professional Education:*

**Bill Analysis Workshop:**  
Identifying legislation plus a comprehensive analysis of its significance.  
**February 10**

**Demystifying the Legislative Process:**  
The lawmaking process and how it works.  
**February 11**

*Programs are from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM in Sacramento & include materials. Ask about our new 1/2 day rates. Discounts for State Net clients.  
Call for more information or to reserve your place. 916/444-2840*



## Carving out center ground

In that heady moment before the TV cameras on election night, Gray Davis described his 20-point victory as "a clear affirmation that Californians want to take a moderate path to the future."

"That is who I am," he said, "and that is how I will govern."

It seemed to make perfect sense at the time. But as Davis and his team actually get down to governing, there is this nagging question: In a state where better than 60 percent of residents tell pollsters that things are generally going in the right direction, is the moderate path to the future straight ahead, which is to say a continuation of Pete Wilson's administration? Or is it some middle course between the conflicting desires of that restive third of the populace that professes unhappiness with the way California is headed?

Tricky business, this moderate path to the future. Voters — and pundits — are hardly in a position to complain that candidate Davis misled anybody about his agenda. Apart from a mostly general commitment to improve education, he didn't offer one. It's not surprising that three months after the election we're still guessing about where the new governor would like to go. What's striking is an almost total absence of expectations.

"If he did nothing but fix every pothole and every leaky school roof, he'd be a success," says GOP political consultant Tony Quinn, who notes with some amusement that nobody seems to talk about California being ungovernable anymore.

So what does it mean to govern as a moderate, indeed to define oneself that way? Moderate may be swell when it comes to climate, but it's hard to figure out where it starts you, let alone where it gets you, in crafting education, tax, health, transportation or environmental policy.

According to language maven William Safire, *moderate* is a "position slightly to the left of center, a word more dynamic than middle-of-the-roader and more acceptable to conservatives than *liberal*." As a right of center sort of fellow himself, Safire is perhaps understandably GOP-centric in his definition. But his point is well taken.

Although the term moderate has a political history dating back to the 16th century, its modern usage is most firmly rooted in the battle

between Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater for the 1964 Republican presidential nomination.

Maybe then, "moderate" is the wrong term altogether for a Democratic administration. Maybe Governor Davis is best understood as a man of the center.

Webster's defines "center" as "a grouping of political figures holding moderate views, especially between those of conservatives and liberals." Safire is more illuminating in this regard.

The center, he says, is "the area where the swing voter lies, where the big decisions are made." And a *centrist* is "one closely attuned to the thinking of the majority," a politician who "can attract both mildly liberal and mildly conservative votes and can develop a pattern of positions

that encompass points on both sides of an ideological fence." The entry in Safire's Political Dictionary is handily cross-referenced to the term *opportunist*.

As Davis should know better than anybody after a quarter of a century in Sacramento, California's political winds are subject to sudden changes, which means the center is not so much a fixed point as a constantly shifting set of coalitions and interest groups who have the ability to ply their agendas not only in the legislature but also on the initiative ballot.

Imagine for example, not just a ballot full of initiatives to enact laws a Democratic legislature and Democratic governor have declined to approve, but a ballot full of referenda to overturn laws a noisy or committed minority find objectionable.

If centrism, or moderation, in the new Administration means a return of civility and consensus-seeking in political discourse, that is all to the good. But the big decisions in California over the next four years — on water policy, on health care delivery and cost sharing, on transportation improvements and financing and above all on sorting out the tangled relationships between state and local government — don't easily lend themselves to middle ground.

Candidates, as the November election clearly showed, do well in seeking the center. Governors have to build it. 🏛️

*Contributing Editor Susan Rasky is on the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley. Comments on her column may be sent to [editor@statenet.com](mailto:editor@statenet.com).*

by Susan  
Rasky



The entry in  
Safire's Political  
Dictionary is  
handily  
cross-referenced  
to the term  
*opportunist*.